

# A Sure Righteousness

*Book of Isaiah*

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**Bible Text:** Isaiah 54:14-17

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I'd like to invite you to look with me in your Bibles to Isaiah 54 and we're going to read from verses 14 down to verse 17. I want to speak with you about a sure righteousness. A sure righteousness. Here in Isaiah 54, the Lord says in verse 14,

14 In righteousness shalt thou be established: thou shalt be far from oppression; for thou shalt not fear: and from terror; for it shall not come near thee. 15 Behold, they shall surely gather together, but not by me: whosoever shall gather together against thee shall fall for thy sake. 16 Behold, I have created the smith that bloweth the coals in the fire, and that bringeth forth an instrument for his work; and I have created the waster to destroy. 17 No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is of me, saith the LORD.

So you can see here in Isaiah 54 in this portion 14 through 17, the number of times that the word "righteousness" appears, a sure righteousness. Every time we stand and pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, we pledge allegiance to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, and then we have those words, "with liberty and justice for all." The particular meeting I was in the other day, they have a habit of businessmen standing and pledging allegiance before each meeting and I stood there myself pledging allegiance but thinking about how often those words are repeated without really giving any consideration as to what they mean and the way my mind goes, those that were pledging, wondering how they perceived the words "allegiance," even the word "Republic," and particularly "under God." Which God are we talking about? But even the word "liberty" and the word "justice," these are strong words and I believe there is a lot of ignorance and misinterpretation in how men perceive these things. It's true particularly with regard to Scripture, how often the word "salvation" or "grace" or "forgiveness," or even as we have here in this text "righteousness," are read and yet with what understanding or misunderstanding.

So that's what I want to do today to begin with before we get too far. When the Scripture here says, "In righteousness shalt thou be established," verse 14, this is just a basic

principle in teaching and that is to understand the definition of the terms so that's the first point, what is righteousness? What is this righteousness of which the Scriptures speak? There are many that we talk with and know that think of righteousness as some external form of living in a right way. We'll hear people say that, "Walk the walk and talk the talk. I hope you're living right." That's how they understand righteousness, obeying certain commands, "Watch what you say." It's interesting that a news reporter might cuss like a sailor when he's off the air but as soon as the news comes on, he is prim and proper. Sometimes he lets it slip when he shouldn't and he'll act like, "I shouldn't have said that," but it's what's in the heart.

Others say that righteousness is more than the external. Some legalists always think there is always a law that can kind of keep people walking right and talking right, but then there are others that argue, "No, it's more inward purity that we are after." So for them righteousness is somehow controlling your thoughts and there are seminars that are done by these men that think that they've got some angle on it so they spend their days, they get you to pay money to them and they spend their days teaching you how you can control your thoughts; how you can control your motives; how you can control the intents of your heart to make sure that those thoughts are always pure and righteous, is the way that it is taught.

There are still others that as you look over the history of the church, have interpreted righteousness as being something that the church has to legislate and so they have tried to use the arm of the government in order to try to bring people in line with what they feel are right principles, even to the point of, according to them, doing the Lord's work with the sword. Going to battle and claiming Romans 13, that the ministers of the Lord don't bear the sword in vain and you can read down through history where men have tried to use persuasion. They have tried to use politics. They have tried to use even the Scriptures, God's law, to bring people in line, and they really think that if we could just get a society that would really actually follow the law set forth in the Old Testament that all would be well.

Would it surprise you if I told you that as good as any of those three definitions may seem, that none of them describe true righteousness? So if that's your thinking that somehow that's righteousness, it's not and I believe there are two Scriptures there to help us. Look in Matthew 5:20 when this Scripture says, "In righteousness shalt thou be established," let's be clear on what the Scriptures are saying. If you think that it is by some form of mind training, heart training, or even outward training as you would with manners or ethics, you know, this is etiquette; this is how to act; this is how to behave. You won't find any that were stricter in that regard than the Pharisees. I know the Pharisees get a bad rap, they stood up against Christ, but as far as morality, external, as far as paying the tithe, they even counted the leaves on their parsley and basil and made sure that they were paying the exact tithe based on what was sold in the marketplace down to the tea leaves, and yet we see here in verse 20 of Matthew 5 our Lord saying, "That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."

That's pretty tough right there if your hope is in some sort of legal legislation of morality and rightness. Is it good to have these things? Yeah, we teach our kids not to steal. We slap their hand if they take something that is not theirs. We teach them not to lie. But those are just safeguards along the way, but just because they don't outwardly steal or outwardly lie doesn't mean that they are righteous. "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, who can know it?" You know as well as I do when you got punished and sent to your room, you were quiet maybe while you were in the room but you were grrr inside. It's like that Dennis the Menace script that I saw one time and he said, "I might be sitting down on the outside but I'm standing up on the inside."

That's just the way our heart is and the Lord, you know, these were men that had set themselves as standards of righteousness for people to follow. These were the preachers of the land and possibly there were some of them that they lived their entire lifetime without one outward blemish that men could point to and say, "Aha, got him!" They were strict preservers of what they considered the law and yet in one statement our Lord cast them all into hell by saying, "That except your righteousness exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees." These were men that were in the word every day. They held in high honor the word. To be a scribe meant that you spent...that was your task to spend the day making copies of this word. I remember one time as a kid when I was just first learning to use a typewriter, I thought, "Well, I'll start with Genesis and type the entire Bible." Well, after a few mistakes and erasing, going back and trying to do it, I don't think I ever got through Genesis 1.

You know, such is the state of our mind. You might determine that, "I'm going to do something perfectly," you can't and yet that's what these men strove and spent their lives doing and the Lord said, "That unless you have a righteousness that exceeds." I don't believe it meant exceeds in quantity, "Okay, let me give a shot at it." That's not what he was talking about. He's talking about a righteousness of a different kind because the righteousness that God requires for the salvation of sinners is one that is not just right but perfectly right and already therein we stand condemned. "There is none righteous, no not one." So here in Isaiah 54:14 when it says, "In righteousness shalt thou be established," it's talking about a righteousness which man cannot produce. Cannot.

Another Scripture, I said that were two, Romans 14:17. This speaks to those who think that somehow you can legislate righteousness, that if we could just get people to live a certain way, eat a certain way, do a certain way, that society would be right. That's why they keep coming up with laws but there has been no law that has ever made a sinner right or righteous. You know as well as I do that as soon as the law comes out, they are trying to figure out a way around it.

That's the mindset of men and here in Romans 14:17, again, Paul is directed by the Spirit to write these words, "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink." It doesn't have to do with fleshly things, but what? "Righteousness," there is the word, "and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men." If people would just put those two verses together, they would see clearly of what righteousness he speaks, it's in Christ. You would know of what peace he

speaks, it's in Christ. You would know of what joy he speaks, it's in Christ. Here it says in the Holy Ghost but we know even as Christ said that, "The Spirit when he was come, would not speak of himself but he would take the things of Christ and reveal them unto you." So that's the foundation of this portion of Scripture that we're looking at. The righteousness of which the Spirit of the Lord teaches here in my text was prophetically looking forward to the coming, the doing, and the dying of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Notice here it says, "In righteousness shalt thou be established." To establish something means to lay a foundation and build upon it and so the foundation had to be laid. It wasn't among men. There wasn't any among men that could establish this righteousness, but our Lord Jesus Christ did. He came, he earned this righteousness by his obedience. Not just in the letter of the law, but in the spirit of it. He truly obeyed the law in the letter and the spirit. He earned it, he established it and upon completion of that obedience unto death, God the Father imputed it to the spiritual account of every one for whom he came, lived and died, having worked it out in perfect obedience to the satisfaction of a holy God.

You say, "How do you know that's it?" Look in Romans 3. This is one of the toughest things in our day and age because most people don't even want to take the time to sit down and think about these things. They have always been taught one way, "Well, that's not what our preacher says." So they are always running after this elusive righteousness. It's like a book I read years ago entitled "Pursuit of Holiness." When I first read it, I got all excited about it. That was back before I knew anything of the Gospel. I thought I did. And that was a book that I promoted, "Yeah, we need to pursue holiness," and it was all about somehow aligning yourself and getting right and living right and being right, doing right when all the while all I was doing was adding condemnation to condemnation because it wasn't the righteousness of Christ alone.

Here in Romans 3 and I know I refer to it often in preaching but it's just such a powerful Scripture text, in verses 9 down to verse 18, if you have any thought at all that somehow there is some good in you, then read Romans 3:9 through 18 and you'll see where you stand in this matter. "There is none righteous," it says, "no, not one." Verse 11 even says, "There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God." Most people today, they say 83% now, it's kind of dropping, of the population of the United States still considers themselves to be Christian and if you were to ask them, "Oh yeah, we love God. We worship God." And yet in one summary statement here in verse 11, Scripture says that there is none that seeketh after God. Whatever God you say you are seeking is not God. If you want to get some people mad sometimes, that's like throwing a mouse in the middle of a couple of cats and then watching what happens. You put this out there, "If you say you're seeking, it's not God you're seeking. It may be a God but it's not the God." None of us naturally has that within us to seek him.

"There is none that understandeth. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable." That's God's testimony, regardless of what man says. That's God's testimony, but you get down to verse 19, "Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be," what? "Stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." You know how you know when the

Lord has dealt in a sinner's heart? Their mouth is stopped with regard to anything good that they have to say about themselves. As long as someone is babbling and talking about what good they have done, or how good they are, or how good this one is, or how good that one is, or what good work they have accomplished, their heart has never been arrested. They are still lost just by virtue of what they say. Here it says that every mouth may be stopped. If we truly perceived God in his justice as he is in truth, our mouths would be stopped and our hearts would be turned to a righteousness outside of ourselves.

Here in verse 20, it says, "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now," verse 21, "the righteousness of God without the law," it doesn't mean that God set the law aside, but without man having to keep that law, "without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets," that is, the Old Testament, "Even the righteousness of God which is by faith," not in Jesus Christ but, "by faith of Jesus Christ." That's an important translation. That's the way it is in the original. Bob, you read it in Galatians 2. The same use, by faith of Jesus Christ. His faithfulness. What he accomplished by his life and his death that is, "unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference." What that says is any that believe this righteousness, this faith of Jesus Christ, not only was it given them to believe but that's an evidence that Christ has worked out that righteousness for them. "For all have sinned," verse 23, "and come short of the glory of God." That's God's testimony of the sinner, but verse 24, "Being justified freely," how? "By his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

That's how this righteousness was established, coming back here now to Isaiah 54. I believe that's important to lay that groundwork. Notice the word of God here in verse 14. "Every word is inspired and profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction," and what? "Instruction in righteousness," the true righteousness. That's what we're looking at here. And this little word "be" I want you to get a hold of, the Lord being our teacher. "In righteousness shalt thou be established." When you hear the word "be," what is it? It's a passive. You're not the one establishing it. You're not the one doing the righteousness. This is God establishing sinners in that righteousness whereby the sinner remains passive. We've got nothing to contribute but our sin so how could we think that somehow we're going to establish this righteousness? No, you must be established in this righteousness. It is God acting on the sinner's behalf. It's just that simple.

If we go back there to Romans 3:24, hold your finger here, in Romans 3:24, notice how the Scripture puts it here, "Being justified." So many people want to make justifying or our justification before God something you feel or something you do, but Scripture describes it as a state of being. "I have been justified." In fact, that's how the original language puts it, "Having been justified freely by his grace," how? "Through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." It is all tied to the work of the substitute; the work of the Redeemer; the work of another.

You know, if you're the Lord's and he has arrested your heart and revealed Christ in your heart and you have believed, which you will, you will believe if the Spirit has done the work, but your believing is when you were justified. You didn't come into a state of

justification because you believed. There are a lot of people that reason that way, "Well, it's when I believed that now God justified me." No, the Spirit reveals Christ in the heart of those sinners for whom Christ died but your justification was accomplished and established and earned and imputed when Christ died. It goes all the way back.

Remember in Romans 3 we read that this was already testified of in the law and the prophets? You can go back and see in the Passover when the Lord was going to bring Israel out of the land of Egypt and they put blood on the doorpost, what did God say? "When I see the blood, I will pass over you." It's the blood and so it is with the work of Christ.

Notice over in Romans 5:1, again, justification is a "be" word. You don't get justified, you are either justified or you are not. Either Christ has paid your debt or he hasn't. You are either already in that state of justification by his death or you will never be. It's certainly not going to be by your works, and here in Romans 5:1, "Therefore being justified." I believe there is where the comma belongs. There wasn't any punctuation in the original. The editors put it after "faith." We are not justified by believing. "Therefore being justified," you notice it goes back to verse 25. Forget the chapter division. There were no chapter divisions in the original. This was put for helping us read the Scriptures but sometimes it can get in the way.

"Therefore" you say, "Well, what is the therefore there for?" Go back to verse 24, "who was delivered for our offenses and was raised again for our justification." In other words, when Christ rose again, it was a manifestation, an evidence that we, those for whom he had died had been justified. When were they justified? When God accepted the sacrifice. When the blood was shed. When the work was done. When he cried, "It is finished." It was done. He died. He lay down his life.

"Therefore being justified by his death, his burial and his resurrection, "by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." "By faith" goes with the second part. That faith causes us to enter into that peace with God through and by our Lord Jesus Christ and that's really the transition now as you come back here to Isaiah 54 into the second point that I wanted you to see in this portion about the sure righteousness. We have defined what it is. It's the righteousness of God which Christ himself earned, established and God the Father imputed to his people in one time, in one place, by one sacrifice on completion of his death. Period.

When the Scriptures here in verse 14 speak of, "In righteousness," notice it's forward looking, "shalt thou be established." In spite of your wanderings. You see, Israel in the context here was a wandering nation, one that was given over to idolatry and God could have reestablished them in the land and said, "Okay, now let's take it again from the top. Let's do this right." He could have done that until the end of time and there wouldn't have been a rightness to it so it takes the Lord saying, "No, I've got a people for whom I will establish this righteousness and in that they shall be established."

But the rest of these verses then talk about the second aspect of sure righteousness and that's the effects of it, what is, and I hope you can find some comfort in this if you're the

Lord's. What is the blessed state of those whom God has so declared righteous in, by and through the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ? Well, you can see here that it says, "thou shalt be far from oppression; for thou shalt not fear: and from terror; for it shall not come near thee." What is it describing there but a peaceful existence? I had never really, truly, myself, personally had a peaceful existence with regard to my relationship with God because I was coming at it the wrong way and I can guarantee you that's probably how you started off too, with a bunch of fig leaves, trying to figure out how to keep God happy. "Whoops, I didn't have my devotions this morning. I'd better pull off to the side of the road and read my Bible and pray real quickly because if I don't, I might get in a wreck up ahead." That's how people reason and think. What foolishness to think that God is somehow reacting or responding to what we do or don't do. There is no peace in that.

I can remember being told, "Now every night before you go to bed, use your spiritual soap. Before you crawl in under those covers and get comfy, try to think of all the things that you do to offend God today. Remember there are sins of commission and there are sins of omission." Well, I'm sitting there thinking, "How can you even remember a sin of omission? By very definition it means you can't remember it." But keep your accounts short with God until you get out and get down on your knees and somehow that posture was even more important. "Say your prayers before you go nitey-night," and get back in. It's an idolatrous form of worship and sadly being propagated today by many that profess to be Christians. It has nothing to do with our righteousness before God and certainly it cannot produce peace. It's like one preacher said: even if you feel like you have thoroughly repented of everything, once you get in bed you have to get back out again and repent of your repentance. How do you know it's sincere? How do you know it was enough? There is no peace in that.

Here the Lord is saying, "thou shalt be far from oppression; for thou shalt not fear." I don't believe that a person can truly live this life without fear unless the Spirit of God has given them a full view and understanding of just what Christ accomplished in his death. He either paid it or he didn't, and if he paid it, what are you doing worrying about it? I don't mean treating our sin lightly. We continue to cry unto the Lord because of our sin and yet we don't live in fear. We do not live in bondage. We do not live in legal servitude, always afraid that somehow God is mad. If the Lord ever teaches you of the work of Christ, you'll come to see that there is not one ounce of wrath even in his chastening. When he chastens you, it's in mercy. Either Christ paid it or he didn't.

That's the effect of this righteousness. Our assurance is not the cause of Christ justifying us but it's the fruit. Look in Isaiah 32. We've been taking a while going through Isaiah and we could probably get to the end and start over again and never, ever plummet the depths of what's here. But in Isaiah 32:17, if you don't have this verse underscored in your Bible, I would underscore it. It says, "The work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever." That's what the Lord is telling his people here in Isaiah 54:14, "In righteousness shalt thou be established." That when this righteousness is accomplished and fulfilled and done and the representative cries, "It is finished," the work complete, "thou shalt be far from oppression."

You know, it's what disarmed Satan. Until there was that just payment, Satan might have rightly, in his mind, accused God of protecting his people. "You put a hedge around him. They are disobedient, they are lawbreakers just like anybody else but you're showing favoritism," would perhaps be the mindset of Satan in accusation but once the debt is paid, sin was covered until Christ came and put away that sin but once that debt is paid, there is a legal justification for every one of the Lord's people in that death and no oppressor can come and ever accuse God of being unjust because Scripture says, "He spared not his Son, but delivered him up that he might freely give us all things."

"Thou shalt not fear." How many times did the Lord say to his disciples, "Fear not"? That's a command, "Oh no you don't." If you're a child of God, you'd don't fear. All that is a quagmire in which if left to yourself you would drown. You would drown. No, look to Christ. Either he has established you in righteousness or he hasn't and if he has, there is no room for fear. There is no room for doubt.

Now, does that mean then that everything is peachy keen and we don't have to expect there to be opposition? No, verse 15, "Behold, they shall surely gather together, but not by me." I'm thankful that I can't see all of the wickedness and the wiles of Satan against me. I'm thankful I can't imagine or see what's in men's minds who oppose me. I probably couldn't sleep at night. I'm thankful I can't even see all that's within here that would oppose Christ and his work. There are many enemies. There are enemies without, there are enemies within. So there are real threats.

Here it says, "they shall surely gather together." You can't live in this world and be the Lord's and not be threatened. Scriptures say even, "Satan himself goes about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." It's one of the illustrations I remember from years ago in Pilgrim's Progress that over time the Lord gave me some understanding. When Pilgrim had to go to the house of Interpreter but he had to walk up this path and there were two lions, one on either side, from a distance he feared. He thought, "As I get closer, these lions are going to eat me alive." But as he got closer, what did he find? They were chained. They couldn't harm him.

Satan has been cast out. He might accuse but he cannot condemn. He cannot. His name means "accuser of the brethren," and yet the Lord himself is our advocate. He is our advocate whether it be Satan. He's our advocate whether it be our own sin. The fear and doubt that would easily come against us, that's what the Lord says, "whosoever shall gather together against thee shall fall for thy sake." That's why Paul was clear in writing there in Romans 8, "If God be for us, who can be against us? Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" Nothing. I find that to be a very precious promise and it's all based upon, again, the power of God, the authority of God, but also the grace of God.

In verse 16, here is something to remember when you feel like you're going through one of those oppressions, when you feel like the world is against you and if you're a child of God, it is. It's like a friend of mine told me as the Lord began to teach me of his grace, he said, "You're going to be like a salmon swimming against the current the rest your life."



Swimming upstream. Everybody is going this way and you're going this way and I found it to be so. You cannot believe this Gospel that I'm preaching to you and declare it and witness it in this generation and not have men against you, not have opposition. The reason why many don't preach it, why their message is wishy-washy, why they cover it with religious ceremony, it's not because they don't see it written in the Scripture but it's because they don't have the Spirit of Christ in them to declare it. David said, "I believe therefore I have spoken." If a person tells you, "Well, I believe that but I just can't preach it," they don't believe it. They don't believe it. It has never been taught to their heart. That's why they don't preach it. I'd get out. I'd run like Forrest Gump, hard the other way, if I had to sit under somebody that told me that. I've had people, men preachers tell me that over a cup of coffee, "You know, I really believe like you do." No, you don't. If you did you'd be preaching it and your congregation would know it.

That's the boldness that the Lord is, but when there is oppression and the enemy rises against you whether within or without, know that nothing lives or moves or has its being but what God ordains it and that's what verse 16 is about, "Behold, I have created the smith that bloweth the coals in the fire, and that bringeth forth an instrument for his work; and I have created the waster to destroy." Satan is God's Satan. God has him on a leash. He cannot raise a finger but what God gives him the authority to do so. To me, that's a great comfort because when it seems like the world is against you, where do you look? The same place, to Christ. Don't try to figure this thing out yourself. Don't try to run to your own strength. Rest in the Lord.

Here is the promise in verse 17, "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper." I like that. They might be able to kill the body but they cannot take the soul. "To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord."

"And every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn." You see, there has been severe persecution over time where men have laid down their lives for this very Gospel that we sit here freely to listen to right now and I'm able to preach for you. There is a freedom. There might be men plotting to shut this down, but for now I showed up today, well, I wasn't the first one here so the lights were already on, the door was opened, coffee made and we came in and sat down and enjoy a time of fellowship, worship. But there might come a day when the decree or edict is that anybody who comes to this place of worship and will publicly identify with this God and this Christ will be arrested. It really shouldn't affect the way we worship. It really shouldn't affect whether we worship if we truly believe what the Scriptures teach.

But right now he has given us the freedom and the joy but if they can't physically or won't physically stop you, they certainly speak against you. I am so glad even there I don't hear people's conversations at a dinner table after a message, especially if they are enemies of Christ. They'll roast you up one side and down the other. It's the spirit that is in the heart that if they could, they'd kill you. But since they can't, well, let's badmouth them. Let's talk about him. That's the judgment that is spoken of here in verse 17, "every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn." We don't have to say

anything to condemn. You don't have to say anything. Whether they believe it or not doesn't make it so or not so. It's so because God said it and therein is my righteousness.

And notice it says, "This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD." You know, a heritage is something you cannot take away. It has been declared, it has been put in a will, it has been decreed. It is ours in Christ and what is that heritage? To sum it all up, verse 17, "their righteousness is of me, saith the LORD." Don't try to add anything to that. Don't try to take anything from it. If you are the Lord's, your righteousness is of him. That's a perfect righteousness. A perfect standing before God and I can't help but think of what Paul wrote to the Corinthians that, "In Christ he has been made to us," what? "Wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption, that he that glorieth," what does it say? "Let him glory in the Lord." That's a sure righteousness.